



The Insider

www.senate.mi.gov/switalski

Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

November 24, 2004

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and for giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a library near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See schedule for details. Have a safe and Happy Thanksgiving.

Prison Education in Michigan

As the ranking Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee for Corrections, I have visited several of Michigan's prisons.

You wouldn't want to be there.

I didn't want to be there, but I felt it was part of my job to review operations. The huge cellblock at Jackson looks exactly like what you see in *The Shawshank Redemption*. We run a better prison than they did, but it's still no place anyone would ever want to be.

Is prison a picnic?

Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel taught me long ago that you control prisoners with rewards and punishments. TV and work detail outside the jail are privileges that prisons strive for, and if they misbehave you take those rewards away, until they correct their behavior.

So let's talk about prison education.

Among the few positive opportunities for prisoners in Michigan's jails are the Vocational Education programs. The Michigan Department of Corrections swears by them. Isn't it smarter to teach prisoners a trade so they can get a legitimate job when they get out of prison? So they can pay taxes like you and I do? Or do we want to release convicts after they've served their time, knowing only how to commit more crimes? Do we want a revolving door back to prison so we can spend \$30,000 a year housing and guarding perpetual prisoners?

Studies from other states indicate a 25% reduction in recidivism for prisoners who left prison after completing vocational training. With Michigan's prisons bursting at the seams, and state revenue down,

doesn't it make sense to do something to keep people from committing new crimes and reentering prison?

My colleagues in the Senate think so. We voted 37-0 for the Corrections Budget, which funds prisoner education. All 22 Senate Republications joined 15 Democrats and voted for House Bill 4390. So there is unanimous bi-partisan agreement that these educational programs make sense.

I also helped establish another effort. I brought the Director of the Department of Corrections together in my office with officials from the University of Michigan. Several professors at U of M wanted to volunteer their time to teach a class for Women Prisoners. The women get no credit for it, but if they get out of prison and start going to college, they can petition the university for advance placement credit. This program cost the state and the taxpayer nothing, but about 40 women prisoners are participating in it. The women prisoners work hard in the class, and even asked that the class be made harder.

How many teachers anywhere have ever had *that* request?

The teachers volunteer because they feel the university should contribute to a better society, and also because they find it so gratifying to teach women who are so desperate for redemption and a glimmer of hope for a better life.

That is the reality behind prisoner education.

It is the hope that at least a few prisoners can correct themselves and change their lives. Although you wouldn't know it from reading this article, we had to cut the vocational education budget for prisons this year. Times are tough and we just don't have enough money to even maintain last year's efforts. It's a cut I made reluctantly, but it had to be made.

As a taxpayer, I hope that you would understand and accept that.

Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Every other Tuesday at 6:05 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 18)

*Please note that Sterling Heights/Utica/Clinton Township will show the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 5 and Wide Open West Channel 10. Clinton Township will air the TV Insider Show at various times during the last week of every month. Roseville can see the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 18.

Coffee Hours

*Please note that since the District Office is in Roseville, I do not have set coffee hours in Roseville. However, I encourage you to visit the Roseville office. We even have a coffee pot. Everyone is welcome to attend the coffee hours and discuss their issues and concerns.

Nov. 29
7-9 p.m.

Location: Clinton-Macomb Public Library
(35891 Gratiot, north of 15 Mile)

Dec. 6
7-9 P.M.

Location: Sterling Heights Public Library
(40255 Dodge Park)

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